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The following is the text of a backgrounder on Cambodia given by Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. This text is for your information only. However, when appropriate, Embassies should provide the text to their constituent consular posts.

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

At the White House

With Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

At 8:14 P.M. EDT, April 30, 1970, Thursday

The Briefing Room

Mr. Ziegler: I think Jerry Warren may have mentioned the ground rules. You have noted the embargo on the statement which you have of the President's address this evening.

The ground rules are, you can attribute what Dr. Kissinger says to White House officials. It is not for direct quotation.

Q: Is there any reason we can't put this on the record?

Mr. Ziegler: Because I have just stated the ground rules.

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- 3 -

Q: Is there any relation to the Parrot's Beak Operation?
We can't see the map.

Dr. Kissinger: The Parrot's Beak area is here, a distance of some 35 miles from Saigon. The Fish Hook area is here, northwest of Saigon, a distance of about Fifty-five miles.

Q: It is not just in the Parrot's Beak area?

Dr. Kissinger: No, the predominantly South Vietnamese operation is in the Parrot's Beak area, and the combined operation is in the so-called Fish Hook area.

Q: How many Americans are involved?

Dr. Kissinger: Because the operation has just started, we would prefer not to give the actual figures tonight, but there are several thousand.

Q: Dr. Kissinger, are there ground troops involved, American Ground troops?

Dr. Kissinger: American ground troops are involved.

Q: Is this COSVN number 1 and number 27?

Dr. Kissinger: I won't identify any units tonight. The Defense Department no doubt will give you a full briefing on the American units tomorrow. It is an area that has often been described as COSVN 1 and 2.

Q: This is dominantly South Vietnamese or dominantly American?

Dr. Kissinger: If you take the operation all along the frontier, it is probably slightly more South Vietnamese, but I don't have the exact breakdown.

Q: Are Australian forces involved?

Dr. Kissinger: There are Australian forces involved.

Q: Is this an American invasion of Cambodia?

Dr. Kissinger: The question is whether this is an American invasion of Cambodia. Let me repeat again what I have said before, which is important to keep in mind.

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There are 40,000 North Vietnamese and Communist troops in Cambodia. These troops are expanding these base areas and trying to fit them together in one contiguous area. They are pushing out from these areas towards Phnom Penh, with some of their advance elements.

There is not the slightest pretense in these operations that this is a Civil War or any pretense at this stage that there are Cambodians involved. Therefore, when we are talking about invasion, if we want to be clear who has invaded whom, we have to talk about a North Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.

The American operation is directed against the base areas, from which military activities are being conducted into South Vietnam. The American forces will be in there only so long as it is necessary to destroy the supplies that are in these areas.

They will be withdrawn after this operation is completed, and we do not expect the length of this operation to be much more than six weeks to two months. We don't want to tie ourselves to a specific date, but we are talking about a brief operation. We are talking about entirely North Vietnamese territory.

Q: What is to prevent the Communists from coming back and rebuilding these bases?

Dr. Kissinger: Well, the question is what is to prevent the Communists from coming back and rebuilding these bases?

Well, theoretically, a number of things could prevent the Communists from coming back and rebuilding these bases. But in any event, with the beginning of the rainy season, it will be difficult for the Communists to restore their supplies across the Ho Chi Minh Trail, to even begin supplying it for several months, and it will take them several months more to build up the supplies to their present level.

During this period, we hope that Hanoi will realize that the time for serious negotiation has finally come, and that the expectation of wearing us down and of establishing a casualty level beyond which we will not endure, will prove to be in vain.

Q: Will American ground troops be used as long as necessary to protect the Phnom Penh and Lon Nol Government?

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Dr. Kissinger: They are under our command, yes.

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Q: How many American in the Parrot's Beak operation?

Dr. Kissinger: You are not going to get me in a numbers game again, Gentlemen. In the Parrot's Beak operation, there were -- don't hold me to the precise figure -- but I would guess 100 or less.

Q: Are there any other nation's troops, any Korean troops?

Dr. Kissinger: There are no Korean troops and no third-country troops.

Q: Dr. Kissinger, I didn't understand your answer to a recent question about the troop withdrawals. Are there now troop withdrawals?

Dr. Kissinger: I don't have the precise schedule of troop withdrawals before me this evening. I said in my backgrounder in San Clemente that there would be significant troop withdrawals this year from South Vietnam, and I have said that our troop withdrawal program has not been affected by the current operation. So there is nothing new with respect to troop withdrawals to announce to this group tonight.

Q: Dr. Kissinger, could you give us the Administration's expectations of the options or reaction open to North Vietnamese, to the Chinese and to the Soviet Union?

Dr. Kissinger: Stated as a theoretical question, of course, you would have to run the gamut from strong to conciliatory reaction. It is theoretically possible that the North Vietnamese will escalate the fighting for a limited period of time. However, any supplies that they will use up in this reaction will not be available for other purposes that they had planned for the rest of the summer, and our judgment is that this operation over a period of months will save rather than cost lives, and reduce the North Vietnamese military capability rather than enhance it, because, otherwise, we obviously would not have conducted the operation.

Within Cambodia, Murrey, if one looks at it abstractly, the possibilities range from increasing their activities, depending on your judgment on whether their actions are caused by provocations or their own rationale. If they have their own rationale, as we think is probable, then the destruction of a substantial portion of their supplies and the worry about the security of the other base areas may reduce their willingness to launch themselves deep into Cambodia.

But primarily, what is open to Hanoi and what we have made clear to Hanoi, and what we repeat is open to Hanoi is, that the time for serious negotiation is still here. We are not increasing our demands. We are not attempting to humiliate them, but we are trying to make clear that this process in which the opening of negotiations is endlessly sealed with veiled hints of possibilities that may be possible if we paid something in advance, that this period should now be concluded and be replaced by the beginning of serious negotiations.

Whatever the invective might be immediately, we think on sober reflection they will realise that an honorable peace is available to them.

Now with respect to the Soviet Union, we would think that the Soviet Union should very carefully and will undoubtedly weigh carefully its overall relationship with the United States, as against whatever propaganda advantage might be gained over what is a technical incursion, and that it will decide that the offer we have extended to it of an era of negotiation outweighs other factors.

Q: If the Congress attempts to block these decisions by the President, is their feeling taken into consideration?

Dr. Kissinger: The President is a man who grew up in Congress and I am sure that he took the Congressional reaction into consideration.

Q: Dr. Kissinger, on page two, the President talks about supplying weapons along with other countries to Cambodia. Does this mean that we have decided to provide a limited amount of small arms directly to the Cambodian Government in answer to their requests?

Dr. Kissinger: We have so far given our assistance by encouraging third-country sales. We have not yet delivered some of these weapons directly but I cannot exclude that this may happen. But we have not adopted a massive military aid program which would require a continuing and large advisory presence.

Q: Did the President give any consideration at all the national commitments resolution that passed overwhelmingly last August?

Dr. Kissinger: I can only repeat what I said before, that the President gave full consideration to these factors. This has been a very difficult and in many ways a very painful decision, and one that would have been possible to avoid, and simply let things rock along.

CA-2457

It was his judgment that for the security of our forces in Vietnam, for the credibility of American policy in many parts of the world, and for the future security of the United States, that he had no choice, and he, therefore, made the decision.

Q: In an earlier war, there was no invasion of sanctuaries for fear of Chinese intervention. Is the President so sure in the case that there will be no Chinese intervention?

Dr. Kissinger: No one can tell. Do you all understand the question? The question is that in an earlier war there was no invasion of the sanctuaries for fear of Chinese intervention. Is the President so sure that there will be no intervention, or that there will be no Chinese intervention?

If one could be sure in policy-making, it would be an easier process. Our best judgment is that the risks of this course, of doing this, are less than the risks of not doing it.

It was very carefully considered and it is our judgment that doing nothing would have been more dangerous, would have risked more lives and, therefore, the decision was taken.

Q: Dr. Kissinger, you talk about a main force buildup. What was their reaction to our action tonight of our allies in South Vietnam? Did we talk to them ahead of time, or SEATO?

Dr. Kissinger: Our allies have been informed and I cannot give you the full details of their reaction, but I have no reason to believe that they don't approve it.

Q: How about the prisoner of war compounds mentioned?
Are there any Americans?

Dr. Kissinger: We do not know.

Q: Dr. Kissinger, the President speaks of a main force buildup in the sanctuaries. How many enemy troops were in the sanctuary, how many days ago, and how many are there now, in your judgment?

Dr. Kissinger: We would like to reserve details of the opposing order of battle until the military operations are somewhat further advanced. In the Parrot's Beak area, the estimate was of something between 5,000 and 10,000.

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- 9 -

Q: As of what time?

Dr. Kissinger: As about two weeks ago. And this is the area from which they have been attacking this town which I can never pronounce, Svay Rieng, or something like that.

In this area, the number is probably larger, but it is not at all certain that they will choose to defend either area, but I repeat, we are not interested in the personnel, we are interested in the supplies.

Q: Dr. Kissinger, the President speaks here of an age of anarchy and attacks or systematic destruction of great universities and on great institutions.

Is he contending that these attacks on universities and other institutions are keyed in with the Communist effort in Southeast Asia?

Dr. Kissinger: No, he does not intend to say that there is a direct relationship between what goes on in Southeast Asia and what goes on domestically in many countries. But he holds the view that there is a psychological relationship.

Q: Does this invasion indicate that you are pursuing a military victory in South Vietnam in advance of progress at the peace table?

Dr. Kissinger: First of all, I have to reject the phrase "invasion." We are not invading Cambodia. We are moving into North Vietnamese-controlled territory from which they have expelled Cambodian control for many years.

It is not territory in which Cambodian control has run for many years. We have no intention of occupying Cambodian territory. We will withdraw from this territory as soon as we have achieved this objective, and we will withdraw within a finite time.

It is not we who have been pursuing military victory. It is not we who have been publishing documents on how to defeat the enemy.

We are trying to make it clear that a negotiated solution that is just to everybody, of which the one minimum condition is that it should enable the people of South Vietnam an opportunity to determine their fate, is maintained.

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We have not escalated our peace terms. The terms, the basic negotiating principles are as they were outlined in the President's speech of April 20, remain unaffected, and no fair reader of these principles can deny that they offer many possibilities in which a serious negotiation could start if the other side can ever bring itself to the point of recognition that it cannot have total victory, and that it cannot have surrender of essential terms, as a pre-condition to even negotiation.

Dr. Kissinger: The threat posed by these areas, along the Cambodian frontier, is their proximity to major centers of population in South Vietnam, and to major concentrations of allied and American forces in South Vietnam, and therefore, to the security of our forces in South Vietnam.

Q: I would like to ask two things: one is how long has that threat that you just referred to existed?

Secondly, Prior to the middle of March, these base areas were confined in extent, and were kept on somewhat short rations by the supply of rice which the Cambodian Government permitted to enter these base areas. Since then, these base areas have been pushed into Cambodia, and they are being connected with one another.

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- 11 -

Q: Dr. Kissinger, didn't the Lon Nol Government invite this invasion by stating their opposition to the Communists?

Dr. Kissinger: I find it difficult to believe that the Cambodian Army has terrified the Vietnamese forces in these sanctuaries that have been fighting the American forces.

Q: The speech says on page 2 that we will provide aid, but the aid we will provide will be limited. What aid are we going to start beginning to supply?

Dr. Kissinger: It will be mostly in the nature of small arms, and perhaps such things as mortars, but no weapons that require foreign advisors or of great technical complexity.

Q: When did the President make the decision to take the action that was initiated tonight, and when did he make the decision on the action that was initiated yesterday?

Dr. Kissinger: I don't think that I want to give the dates on which the President made these decisions, but I can say that both decisions were made after the speech on April 20.

Q: Did the impetus come from General Abrams and the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

Dr. Kissinger: I don't think that I want to provide a check list of who recommended what, except to say that the President has thought about these problems deeply, and thoughtfully, and I must say, having seen him wrestle with this, he was not pushed into it, and he did not do it in order to balance off any bureaucratic considerations.

Q: Was the President held back in these decisions by the possibility that there was something to the Malik offer of negotiations? Was that a factor in the delay?

Dr. Kissinger: The question was, was the President held back by Yakov Malik's peace move.

No. Of course, if the Soviet proposal had eventuated, it might have made it unnecessary to take this decision. But what forced the administration to address these particular contingencies was the explicit open movement of the Communist forces out of the sanctuary areas, and beyond even the vaguest definition of sanctuary areas, towards Phnom Penh.

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I must repeat again, if one is talking of invasion, that is the invasion that has taken place.

Q: Dr. Kissinger, are you saying that in three to six weeks all of the American combat troops will be out of cambodian territory? You said it would take three weeks to two months.

Dr. Kissinger: I said six weeks to two months. I expect that by that time all American forces will be out of Cambodian territory.

Q: Just ten days ago the President was telling us that Vietnamization was going so well, he was withdrawing 150,000 troops. I don't understand what has happened in the meantime to cause us to take what to many people seems to be an escalating military action.

Dr. Kissinger: Again, let me point out what was said before. We are fighting not 10 to 15 miles inside Cambodia, exactly the same troops that we are normally fighting inside Vietnam. The thing that has changed is not the nature of the enemy or the character of the enemy. Therefore, it is not self-evident that this is an escalation.

Secondly, what has escalated is the movement of these Communist forces out of their sanctuary areas into Cambodia, their attempt to create a contiguous stretch of Communist controlled territory along the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border in which they would then have much greater freedom of movement than they ever had in the previous period, and which in combination with other moves represented what the President judged to be an unacceptable threat to security.

Q: Wouldn't it be a military decision rather than the timing of the decision which kept Secretary Rogers from telling the Foreign Relations Committee about this part of the operation?

Dr. Kissinger: About which part of the operation?

Q: Any part of the operation.

Dr. Kissinger: Well, I suggest that you ask Secretary Rogers, but of course, military necessity was one of the factors. It was one of the factors and there were others.

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CA-2457

Q: The Foreign Minister of Cambodia says that their Government did not give permission to yesterday's military sweep, that they object to it, and they have launched a protest to South Vietnam and to our Government. Can you explain their objection to this?

Dr. Kissinger: The question is that the Foreign Minister of Cambodia does not approve of yesterday's operation, and that he lodged a protest. There have also been other expressions from Cambodia, by other spokesmen, that indicate that anything that removes the Vietnamese from their territory is welcome. But I would think that this is an understandable position of a Government that does not want to give additional pretext for Communist movements into their territory.

The Press: Thank you, Dr. Kissinger.

Rogers

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